

# Paper Presentation - Seeking serendipity

Citation for published version (APA):

Wopereis, I., & Braam, M. (2017). *Paper Presentation - Seeking serendipity: The art of finding the unsought in professional music*. Paper presented at The Fifth European Conference on Information Literacy (ECIL), Saint Malo, France.

## Document status and date:

Published: 18/09/2017

## Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

## Document license:

CC BY-NC-ND

## Please check the document version of this publication:

- A submitted manuscript is the version of the article upon submission and before peer-review. There can be important differences between the submitted version and the official published version of record. People interested in the research are advised to contact the author for the final version of the publication, or visit the DOI to the publisher's website.
- The final author version and the galley proof are versions of the publication after peer review.
- The final published version features the final layout of the paper including the volume, issue and page numbers.

[Link to publication](#)

## General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal.

If the publication is distributed under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license above, please follow below link for the End User Agreement:

<https://www.ou.nl/taverne-agreement>

## Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us at:

[pure-support@ou.nl](mailto:pure-support@ou.nl)

providing details and we will investigate your claim.

Downloaded from <https://research.ou.nl/> on date: 05 May. 2023

**Open Universiteit**  
[www.ou.nl](http://www.ou.nl)



Seeking Serendipity:  
The Art of Finding the Unsought  
in Professional Music

Iwan Wopereis (Open University of the Netherlands)  
Michiel Braam (ArtEZ University of the Arts)

Expertisecentrum onderwijs en professionalisering

Open Universiteit  
www.ou.nl



Seeking **Serendipity**:  
The Art of Finding the Unsought  
in Professional Music

Definition

- Making discoveries by accidents and sagacity, of things [someone is] not in quest of (Merton & Barber, 2004)
- An unexpected experience prompted by an individual’s valuable interaction with ideas, information, objects, or phenomena (McCay-Peet & Toms, 2015)

Examples

- Impact on society
  - Aspartame
  - Post-It
  - X-Ray
- Impact on the individual
  - SIS (McBirnie, 2008; see also Heinstrom, 2005)

Overview

- Introduction
- Method
- Results
- Discussion

Overview

- Introduction
- Method
- Results
- Discussion

Introduction BACKGROUND

- Serendipitous experiences (e.g., SIS) were mentioned in interviews on musical expertise development
- Emerging body of literature on SIS (Makri & Blandford, 2012; McBirnie 2008; McCay-Peet & Toms, 2015)

Introduction BACKGROUND

- There seems to be a relationship between the concepts of serendipity and improvisation (McBirnie 2008)
- and... workplace information literacy

Introduction BACKGROUND

Investigating Serendipity: How it Unfolds and What may Influence it

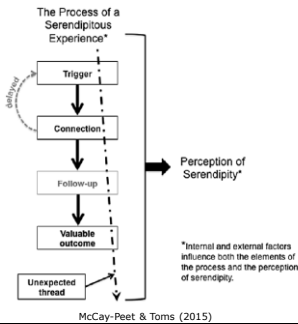
Lois McCay-Peet  
Faculty of Management, Dalhousie University, 6100 University Avenue, Halifax, NS B3H 3J5, Canada. E-mail: mcp@dal.ca

Elaine G. Toms  
Information School, University of Sheffield, Regent Court, 211 Portobello, Sheffield S1 4DP, United Kingdom. E-mail: e.toms@sheffield.ac.uk

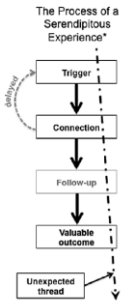
Serendipity is not an easy word to define. Its meaning has been directed to apply to experiences ranging from the immediate to the exceptional. Serendipity, however, is commonly associated with unexpected and positive personal, scholarly, scientific, organizational, and social events and discoveries. Chance serendipitous experiences share a conceptual space: therefore, what lessons can we draw from an exploration of how serendipity unfolds and what may influence it? This article describes an investigation of work-related serendipity. Twenty professionals and academics from a variety of fields were interviewed. The core of the semi-structured

It is important to understand serendipity, what influences it, and what may facilitate it. However, although serendipity leads to gain headlines when it has a substantial and wide-reaching impact, serendipity's importance at the micro level should not be dismissed in terms of the positive affective response it evokes and the learning it sparks. Serendipity can bring simple pleasures and happiness to a person's everyday life (Shahin, Barkett, & Quinn Hanes, 2011) and the response associated with serendipity has the power to jog our minds, to push us to think, and learn more.

McCay-Peet & Toms (2015)



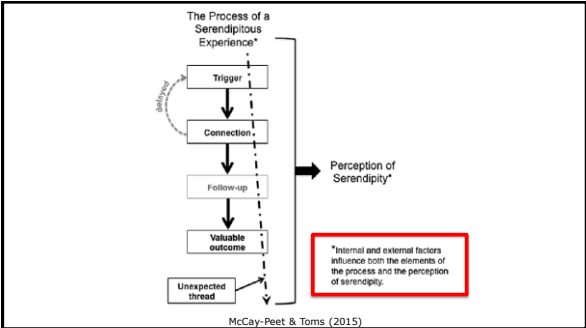
McCay-Peet & Toms (2015)



McCay-Peet & Toms (2015)

Model ELEMENTS

1. Trigger
2. Delay
3. Connection
4. Follow-up
5. Valuable outcome
6. Unexpected thread
7. Perception of serendipity



Model INFLUENCING FACTORS

- 1. Trigger-rich external
- 2. Highlights triggers external
- 3. Enables connection external
- 4. Enables capturing external
- 5. Openness internal
- 6. Ability to make connections internal
- 7. Prepared mind internal

Introduction QUESTIONS

- RQ1: How can we best define work-related serendipity in a creative domain like music and how does it relate to concepts like creativity and improvisation?
- RQ2: Does the model of McCay-Peet and Toms explain how work-related serendipitous (information) behavior unfolds in professional improvised music?
- RQ3: Does the model explain conditions that may influence the process of serendipity within the aforementioned context?

Overview

- Introduction
- Method
- Results
- Discussion

Method

- Subject
  - Professional musician (jazz, and improvised music); Professional > 30 years
- Cases
  - Case 1: Toxic
  - Case 2: Globe

Method

- Procedure
  - Data collection (McCay-Peet, 2013)
    - Quadripartite Narrative Interview (total 3 hours)
      - Work
      - Definition
      - Examples
      - General
  - Data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)
    - Thematic open coding of interview data

Case 1



Case 1 TOXIC

During a search for musical information on YouTube, this system recommended MB to watch the music video 'Toxic' of pop musician Britney Spears. This recommendation surprised MB: "[This kind of music] takes place completely out of my comfort zone. Let's say that Britney Spears does not have my direct interest. Excellent singer, nothing wrong with that, but it's not the kind of music I would normally listen to."

Case 2



<https://rockinfiles.com/sam-RC/Michiel%20Braam-1999-11-07.mp3>

Case 2 GLOBE

The rationale of the Globe project was to form a group of musicians from different corners of the world (i.e., **The Tuva Ensemble** from Tuva, **The Bisserov Sisters** from Bulgaria, **The Ndere Troupe** from Uganda, and improvisers **Fred van Duynhoven and MB** from the Netherlands) and perform a series of concerts at the Music Meeting [Nijmegen, NL] and other musical sites in the Netherlands.

Overview

- Introduction
- Method
- Results
- Discussion

Results RQ1 DEFINITION

- MB: "This [...] is actually very useful for everthing I do ... What's here is all about improvisation."
- However these definitions "... have nothing to do with serendipity" as someone should be "in search of something else."
- THUS: Serendipity is "Finding B, when looking for A"

### Results RQ1 DEFINITION

- With regard to improvisation, MB tries “... to have as few expectations as possible in advance” when he starts to play.
- This position towards the improvisational act has developed over the years: “The more I improvise and the longer I do it, I think that I should really sit ‘completely empty’ there [in other words, on stage], and then I’ll see what will happen.  
**That means, it can never be a serendipity, because I’m not looking for something.”**

### Results RQ1 DEFINITION

- However, during the member check in the third interview MB nuanced his initial view on improvisation and search.
- “I think it is difficult not to be in search of something during an entire concert.” “During a concert, you actually start completely empty. ... And at some point something [musically] happens and you start investigating it, which is a search for a concrete solution. During this search new things can be discovered.”

### Results RQ1 DEFINITION

- MB illustrates this by mentioning an example to investigate a certain chord, because it sounds so awful (in this case, a C Majeur 7 or c-e-g-b):
- “And then [while performing] you discover that a reversal of notes can result in an interesting rhythmic pattern in which the original notes of the chord actually sound much nicer. ... It [i.e., the unsought finding] becomes part of your ‘backpack’

### Results RQ2 – MODEL PHASES

- Case 1 and 2 fit McCay-Peets and Toms’ model.
- Model ‘phases’ were identified, particularly
  - Trigger
  - Connection
  - Valuable outcome
  - Unexpected thread
  - Perceived serendipity

### Results RQ2 – MODEL PHASES

- Case 1
  - Trigger                                      Toxic with stringed instruments
  - Connection                                with need for repertoire for BB
  - Valuable outcome                        arrangement song for Big Band
  - Unexpected thread                        surprising suggestion by YouTube

### Results RQ3 – INFLUENCING FACTORS

Case 1 (Toxic, SIS): ‘Prepared mind’ MB is aware that recommendation systems are ‘algorithm-based’

Results RQ3 – INFLUENCING FACTORS

Case 1 (Toxic, SIS): ‘Prepared mind’ MB is aware that recommendation systems are ‘algorithm-based’

“There’s also a negative side to it. When someone is searching the [YouTube] system and gets something in the right column, he/she is inclined to select the first videos in the list. ... There is a danger that you don’t think anymore ...What kind of society we’ll get when Google or YouTube search for you? Then we’ll get an algorithmic society.”

Results RQ3 – INFLUENCING FACTORS

CONTINUED

“Although I don’t believe in conspiracy theories, I think these companies try to create mainstream. You can control mainstream, not chaos.”

Results RQ3 – INFLUENCING FACTORS

- Factors are present in case 1 and 2, e.g.:
  - ‘trigger-rich’ (YouTube recommender systems; musical projects that focus on variability, unusual group composition)
  - ‘openess’ (in order to ‘witness’ serendipity, one should be open to ‘triggers’)
  - ‘prepared mind’ (one should have a knowledge base in order to ‘spot’ serendipity: see Globe)

Results RQ3 – INFLUENCING FACTORS

- New factors
  - Curiosity (e.g., ‘being interested in other music’)
  - Initiative (e.g., ‘take initiative to ‘explore’ new pathways and/or information’)
  - Interest in others (i.e., ‘serendipity is often the result of group work’)

Overview

- Introduction
- Method
- Results
- Discussion

Discussion

- McCay-Peet and Toms’ model is valuable to describe work-related serendipitous experiences in the domain of music

## Discussion FUTURE RESEARCH

- Varied focus, varied methods
  - Serendipity on *micro level*: recordings, cued retrospective interview and observation
  - Serendipity on *meso level*: retrospective interviews
- Scaling up
  - Multi-case studies in order to generalize findings

## Meer informatie

[iwan.wopereis@ou.nl](mailto:iwan.wopereis@ou.nl)

Expertisecentrum onderwijs en professionalisering

Open Universiteit  
[www.ou.nl](http://www.ou.nl)

